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U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire was part of a bipartisan effort Thursday to introduce legislation in the House and Senate that would strip Americans of their citizenship for aiding a foreign terrorist organization or fighting against the United States.

If an American goes abroad to train or fight with terrorists, "I don't think it's asking too much to think that they should lose their citizenship," said Altmire, D-4, McCandless Township, Thursday.

Altmire's legislation in the House was co-sponsored by Pennsylvania U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent, R-15, Allentown, who has pursued similar legislation.

In the Senate, U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and U.S. Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass., introduced legislation. The four congressmen appeared at a rare bipartisan joint press conference in the U.S. Capitol Thursday to unveil the Terrorist Expatriation Act.

The legislative effort comes less than a week after a Pakistani-born American citizen tried to ignite a car bomb in New York City's Times Square Sunday. Faisal Shahzad of Connecticut was captured on an airplane Tuesday at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City.

Altmire, though, said the legislation has been planned for several weeks. "It's more in response to the Yemen situation," he said, referring to Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born cleric who promotes jihad in Yemen, and Sharif Mobley, a New Jersey native and suspected Al Qaeda member who recently killed a guard and injured another by trying to shoot his way out of a Yemeni prison.

Terrorists want nothing more than to recruit Americans who can easily return here to kill their fellow citizens, Altmire said. Americans stripped of their citizenship would automatically have their passports revoked, he said.

“Their ability to then travel back to the United States and carry out these attacks would be negated,” Altmire said.

The current law offers seven acts under which Americans can lose their citizenship, such as joining the armed forces of a country fighting the United States, but it is 70 years old and doesn’t address terrorism, Altmire said.

“It doesn’t account for the current war on terror,” he said. “All we’re doing is modernizing the existing law.”

Altmire said the legislation would not change the process to void an American’s citizenship. The U.S. Department of State would determine that an American effectively renounced citizenship by supporting a foreign terrorist organization.

The citizen in question would still be able to appeal that decision to the state department and to federal court. “It’s a very, very difficult process and that doesn’t change,” Altmire said.